

Gender based Political Violence: A Weapon of War?

Shivani Raj

Research Scholar, Patliputra University, PPU, Patna, India

Abstract: *For centuries we have heard or seen women being suppressed by the men and the society. Be it in the mythology of Mahabharat or the history of conquering a kingdom. Sati was practiced in India earlier and one of the main reasons that it happened by the women of that kingdom was that if the King captivated or dies in the war the enemy winning should not use the women for their pleasure. No matter how many laws are passed, amendments are made in the constitution, committees are set up for the rights of women's empowerment and punishments are given maybe this change will never happen. Women and children are the first vulnerable in every war or communal situation. This article talks about how women are sexually used during war and conflicts. How the feminists will always keep fighting and raising voices in hope that one day maybe the society will understand and change but they will keep getting disappointed.*

Keywords: Sexual Violence, War Rape, Gender - based political violence, Gender Inequalities, Feminism.

Since the beginning of time or since the beginning of wars taking place either between the Kings and the people or between countries, communities, class or caste. There has always been violence against women. Women are the first victims. Rape and other forms of sexual violence against them have been pervasive in conflicts throughout history. Women bodies are exploited in war and elsewhere. Women have always been the easy target and easier for men to use and show the power, because they think as they are physically strong and have all the rights and strength to use it against a woman.

Few months back, we saw in the news a very disturbing footage of what had happened in the North - eastern State of Manipur. Ethnic clashes have been taking place between the majority Meitei community and the minority Kuki community that has plunged the North - East state of Manipur. Numerous cases of sexual violence on Kuki women by Meitei men have been reported. The violence in Manipur started because the Meitei community asked for Scheduled Tribe status and Kuki tribals were against it. On 19th July '23, the horrifying broadcast in the Media that has gone viral of two Kuki women in Manipur were being paraded naked, they were harassed, raped by a mob of Meitei community men. The atrocities and inhuman act committed against the two women. The video has sparked wrath and anger across the country. As of 29th July, '23 181 people have been killed, thousands have been injured and more than 60, 000 people have been displaced from their homes in the communal violence taking place in Manipur. The Chief Minister of Manipur state N. Biren Singh acknowledged about the incident "that there have been hundreds of such cases".

Here in today's time, we are talking about women achieving great heights and succeeding in every field either equal to their male counter - part or even more than them. In today's time we are seeing the change as women are given opportunities in every turn of their life but the mentality of the society and people will never change. There will always exist a Patriarchal society which will try to subdue women. I guess it's their ego or so called masculinity which can't take the fact that women have rights and freedom to say and do what they want to.

The scholars, researchers, theorists have fairly recently identified rape/ sexual violence as an intentional and wilful

tool of conflicts and war, rather than simply an inevitable side effect of the fight.

Carl Schmitt a German political theorists and a prominent member of Nazi Party in one of his theory talks about power and how it should be. He criticised Democracy, Liberalism and Cosmopolitanism as adopted by the Western Society at that time. From a feminist perspective, the theory of dictatorship, as said by Schmitt is "a fantasy of masculine potency and power".

Sara Meger in her book – 'Rape Loot Pillage: The Political Economy of Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict' says that rape and other forms of sexual violence have always been a feature of war. The author also says that it's related to political - economic conditions of skirmish and the motives of the perpetrators. In her book she argues that sexual violence is a form of gender - based political violence against both men and women and a manifestation of unequal gender relation that are exacerbated by the conditions of war.

According to Amnesty International, most survivors of sexual violence experience severe mental harassment. Most victims report that they were being brutalised because of their identity and the need to cleanse them.

There is a normative framework within the International Law that addresses and provides wide protection against rape, sexual violence but enforcement of these provisions is weak. The Geneva Convention in 1949 recognized sexual violence during conflicts. The General Secretary of United Nation in the report pointed out 20 situations of concern on this subject, said that "women and girls account for 94% of the 2, 455 United Nations verified cases of conflict - related sexual violence committed. An initiative which took place in 2007 by The United Nation known as "UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict (UN Action)". It's a network of 24 UN entities, united with the goal of ending sexual violence during and in the wake of armed conflict. The UN Action aims to: prevent conflict - related sexual violence, enhance accountability, meet the needs of survivors of sexual violence. UN Action was created in response to "Call to Action" of 2006 Symposium on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Beyond, held in Brussels.

Volume 13 Issue 3, March 2024

Fully Refereed | Open Access | Double Blind Peer Reviewed Journal

www.ijsr.net

War Rape or sexual harassment is an act of unspeakable violence but its an act that draws its power from the cultural, political, economic structures that frame our existence as gendered creature in a patriarchal society. Feminist theorists analyse that gender inequalities increase the likelihood of armed conflict and that the armed conflict frequently results in sexual violence against women. Understanding rape and sexual harassment during war or conflict involves an analysis of the societal structure that precede and situate the conflict and an awareness of how militant masculinity is celebrated. Acknowledgment and documentation of these types of rapes and sexual harassment is the first step towards its prevention.

Sexual harassment as a weapon or strategy of war represents an important paradigm. In 1975, Susan Brownmiller for the first time drew attention to the use of rape in her book "Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape". She later qualified some of her controversial statements and alleged that even though not all men rape but all men benefit from the actions of rapists because women's fear of being raped prevents them from challenging the patriarchal order.

On 28th September 2009, members of the Guinea armed forces reacted to women's political protests with rampant and violent rapes. In former Yugoslavia the war rape committed by Bosnian Serb soldiers increased sexual terrorism. During the time of World War II more than 2, 00, 000 women and girls were kidnapped by the Japanese armed forces for sexual slavery and were referred to as 'War Supplies'. Rape and Sexual harassment became a way to humiliate enemy forces through their inability to protect the community.

Sexual Violence has been used as a weapon in conflicts to humiliate, subjugate and terrorise populations through history. Victims of sexual violence range in age from 4 years of age to 80 years old. The violence in many cases includes gang - rape, forcing family members to watch while their children and mothers are sexually assaulted and in most of the cases sexual violence qualifies as torture or cruel inhuman treatment. There have been many cases of sexual violence during conflict around the world like - Ukraine (done by Russian soldiers on Ukrainian women), Tigray/Ethiopia (against Amhara and Eritrean), Haiti, etc. A recent study has connected the still abiding economic and political conditions with cultural norms and the gender strain produced by prolonged armed conflict. Various scholars and authors have agreed that gender inequalities are a predictor of armed conflict. Seminars, discussions should take place on these topics so that people and the youth should be aware about it. Strict actions need to be taken against the hideous crime.

(The writer of this Article is a Research Scholar at Patliputra University, PPU, Patna. The writer has done her Graduation & Post - Graduation from University of Delhi)